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ABSTRACT

This article describes a series of Scandinavian studies in reader response from 1968 to 1990. Studies chronologically discussed in the article are: (1) "Rhythm in Poetry"; (2) "The Esthetic Experience"; (3) "Meaning in Literary Texts"; (4) "Tension"; (5) the "Ram" study; (6) the "Fairytale" project (discontinued); (7) a continuation of the "Ram" study; and (8) the "Folktale" project, a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary study of the experience of literature. The article's final section, "Reading Crossnationally: A Discussion," concludes that, so far, theses studies have shown that narratives change according to situational contexts, and that there is a multiplicity of aspects to which readers can relate even at some vaguely intersubjective level. (Nine illustrative diagrams, 1 table of data, and 15 footnotes are included.) (RS)

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Cay Dollerup, Iven Reventlow, Carsten Rosenberg Hansen (Copenhagen)

THE COPENHAGEN STUDIES IN READER RESPONSE

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DAS KOPENHAGENER PROJEKT ZUR LESERFORSCHUNG

Die Verfasser beschreiben Untersuchungen, die sie in Kopenhagen (Dänemark) innerhalb eines Projekts entwickelt und durchgeführt haben, das sie "Experimentelle Rezeptionsforschung" nennen. Durch dieses Projekt ergab sich eine enge Zusammenarbeit zwischen Literaturwissenschaft, Psychologie und Statistik. 1968–1990 wurde dies als "nordisches" Projekt durchgeführt, dessen Ziel die Entwicklung spezifischer Methoden der empirisch–experimentellen literarischen Rezeptionsforschung ist. In diesem Bericht werden drei der fünf durchgeführten Untersuchungen im Überblick dargestellt.

Die Untersuchung über "Intensität in Kurzgeschichten" ergab eine reiche Menge neuer Informationen über den literarischen Leseprozeß. Die "Widder"–Untersuchung (so genannt nach der gleichnamigen Kurzgeschichte der dänischen Schriftstellerin Cecil Bödker) zeigte, daß man den literarischen Leseprozeß – zumindest in einigen speziellen Aspekten – empirisch gut aufklären kann. Überdies war es möglich, über die Rekonstruktion rein subjektiver Aspekte hinaus die Ergebnisse zu generalisieren. Überlegungen zur interkulturellen Bedeutung werden vorgestellt und diskutiert.

In the present overview, we have chosen largely to disregard reader response research by others. This is done partly because we feel that there has been a gradual and consistent development from our first study until the last one, partly because references would make the nature of our studies less distinct.

The disciplines covered are literature, psychology, psychometrics, and translation studies.

1.0 THE BEGINNINGS

The beginnings were modest: as a student one of the authors of the present paper (CD) investigated the experience of tension with readers by asking friends to draw up tension curves of their experience of "intensity, tension, and the like" in short stories.

The psychometrician Lars Bostrup became aware of this attempt to establish patterns in the response to reading. He realized the implications, namely that such a charting would have to use individual responses for reaching intersubjectively valid conclusions. He suggested that the study should use the Rasch–item analysis.[1] This method allows for personal differences and lists individual answers in relation to specific factors in the response.

[1] Nowadays, the Rasch item–analysis is widely used. Georg Rasch supported the 'methods project', and both Lars Bostrup and Iven Reventlow cooperated with him. His method is described in Rasch, G. «Probabilistic models for some intelligence and attainment tests». Copenhagen: Danmarks pædagogiske institut. 1960 (later also published in the US).

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At the time, there was considerable concern in all Scandinavia with the phenomenon dubbed "the culture gap". The culture gap was the difference between the elite vs the common man in tastes and consumption of the fine arts. This interest inspired the Nordic Summer University to set up study circles of scholars and other interested parties in order to explore the problem from local angles (in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden).[2] The eventual outcome was the establishment of a large Nordic umbrella research programme concerned with a broad spectrum of cultural life, namely "The theatre as a social institution", "The response to music", "The distribution and evaluation criteria in the theatre and in literature", and "Methodological studies in research on the response to literature". The umbrella programme started in 1968 thanks to an endowment from the Nordic Cultural Fund; despite financial setbacks in the following years most of the studies were carried out. In their totality, they involved the collective efforts of nearly 100 scholars.

2.0 THE METHODS PROJECT (1968 – 1971)

It is the methodological project, and our own studies from then on to the present day which will be discussed in this paper. We, that is the authors of the present paper, were involved in three of the five studies under the "methods projects" (as we named it internally).

Each of the five studies had a specified aim; they all focused on the response to literature from critical, psychological, and statistical angles. The main objective was to develop methods which could be used for the exploration of response to literature independent of space and time. Close coordination was ensured by frequent meetings between the researchers. We shall briefly touch upon the other studies in the "methods project" before we discuss our own research.

2.1 'RHYTHM IN POETRY'

"Processes in the experience of rhythm in poetry" was a Swedish study headed by Gunnar Goude and Sten Malmström. It tested the hypothesis that criticism can predict gradations and shades in intonation in poetry by means of lexicon and stylistic analyses. The study centred around three Swedish poems. After the critical and stylistic analysis, the poems were used in eleven different studies. In some of them, participants would listen to readings of the poems; in

[2]The Nordic Summer University is a body which each year decides to focus on some special, interdisciplinary themes. In most university towns in the Nordic Countries (Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), university scholars then set up study groups on these themes. The study groups are open to interested parties.
In summertime members of the study groups have a session in one city in the Nordic countries to exchange views and reach conclusions.

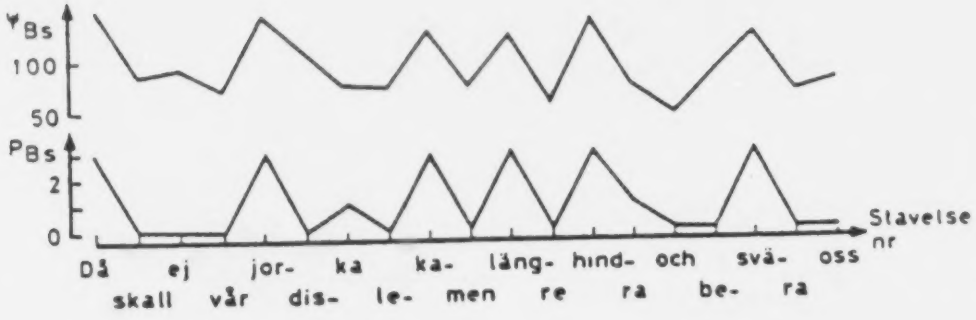
others, they would read the poems and then indicate their experience of various factors on paper. Each factor was studied independently. The information tendered by readers and listeners proved right critical assumptions concerning

- rhythm,
- stress,
- duration, and
- emphasis.

It did not matter whether the poems were read aloud to the participants or whether they read them on their own.

The graphs in Illustration 1 show the striking correspondences between the critical prediction about stress and the readers' assessment. The top graph shows critical predictions, the lower graph readers' responses, syllable by syllable ('stavelse' = syllable)

Illustration 1: THE PREDICTED (top) AND ACTUAL (bottom) EMPHASIS, SYLLABLE BY SYLLABLE, IN A SWEDISH POEM



The main implications are that critical analyses can, indeed, to a high degree predict the subjective experience of poetry. It is obvious that these findings are relevant to ordinary speech acts as well, but, as far as we know, there has been no study pursuing this line of inquiry in Swedish.

The methods used were calculations of averages and traditional measurements of physical duration.[3]

[3]The most comprehensive coverage in English is given in Gunnar Goude: A multi-dimensional scaling approach to the perception of art. «Scandinavian journal of psychology», 13 (1972), 258-284. In addition, L. Linde published some results in English in «Scandinavian journal of psychology», 16 (1976).

2.2 *'THE ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE'*

This study was conducted in Finland by Eino Krohn and Kyösti Kolehmainen.

Eino Krohn had put forward a theory to the effect that there were aspects in the response which were limited to literature which met with critical approval, i.e. special 'esthetic dimensions'.

These dimensions could be defined as moments of special insights: "which fill us with an unusual ecstasis and under whose influence everything seem brilliantly novel and invigorating."

The study used five short stories. Two of them were Finnish translations of Danish and Swedish narratives, viz., 'The Ring' by Karen Blixen (pen name Isak Dinesen), and 'The Basement' by Pär Lagerkvist. Two other ones were highly esteemed Finnish short stories: (a) the traditional 'The Wedding' by Aino Kallas, and (b) the ultramodern 'The Quiet Man' by Veijo Meri. The fifth story was from a weekly; its standard was tolerably high; it was included for control.

It soon became obvious that the study could not probe the existence of specific esthetic dimensions without including numerous other ones as well, such as personal imprint ('original vs. imitative'); cognitive criteria ('hard to understand vs. easily understood'); moral or ethical aspects ('magnanimous vs. mean'); atmosphere ('humorous vs. serious'); involvement ('fascinating vs. boring'); and formal criteria ('unified vs. fragmented').

142 people were given 140 of these bipolar scales (semantic differentials) with seven grades and asked how central they were to the experience of a work of art. Seven dimensions central to the esthetic theory were deliberately not tested out but were included in the main study (e.g. 'refreshing vs. dry').

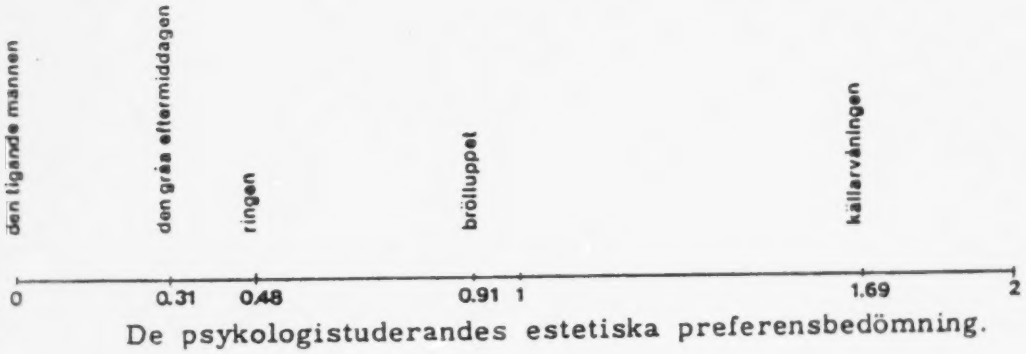
In the subsequent (main) study which followed, 100 students of literature at advanced level and 100 freshman students were given the five short stories and asked to fill in a questionnaire which comprised 49 bipolar semantic differentials on each tale. In order to make the participants read the stories much the same way as they normally would, they had a month for reading the stories and for filling in the questionnaires. Within the month 63 students of psychology and 67 students of literature handed in their completed questionnaires. Their answers on the bipolar semantic differentials were subjected to factor analysis and to hierarchal cluster analysis. Factor analysis identified the esthetic – qualitative evaluation as pertinent to the response: it accounted for 31 per cent of the variation. Cluster analysis revealed differences between the hierarchies set up by students as follows (in descending order of importance):

Students of psychology: 1 authenticity; 2 atmosphere; 3 formal stability; 4 dynamics; 5 esthetic and qualitative evaluation; 6 originality; 7 imaginativeness; 8 realism; 9 liveliness; 10 negative qualitative evaluation (rejection).

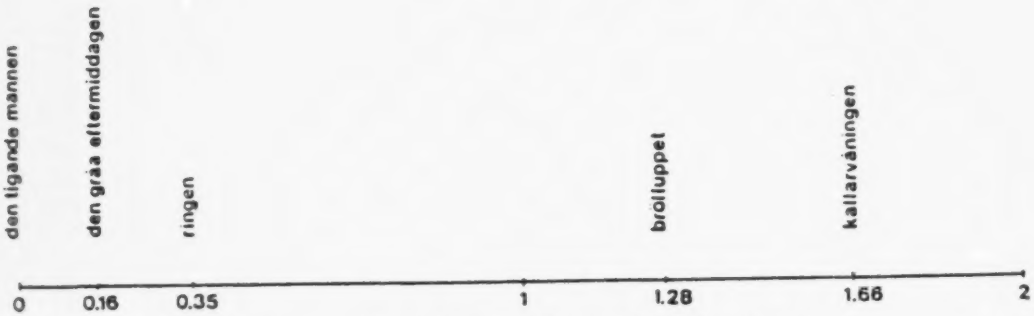
Students of literature ranked the criteria as follows: 1 authenticity; 2 formal stability; 3 dynamics; 4 esthetic and qualitative evaluation; 5 originality; 6 realism; 7 stimulation; 8 comprehension; 9 atmosphere; 10 comprehensibility; 11 negative qualitative evaluation (rejection).

Both groups of readers belonged to the Finnish educated elite; it was, therefore, no surprise that they ranked the stories in the same internal order of preference:

Illustration 2: THE PREFERENCES OF FINNISH STUDENTS OF FIVE SHORT STORIES



De psykologistuderandes estetiska preferensbedömning.



De estetikstuderandes preferensbedömning.

Comment: The top line shows the preferences of students of psychology. The bottom line lists those of students of esthetics.

The graph shows that the modernistic short story ('Den tigande mannen') ranked lowest with both group although it was highly esteemed with critics. The short story from the weekly ('Den graa eftermiddagen') was considered better, but significantly more so by students of psychology, who, on their side, approved more of 'The Ring' by Karen Blixen. Conversely, the students of estethics listed the classical Finnish 'The Wedding' ('Bröllopet') higher than the students of psychology. 'The Basement' was preferred with both groups.

The study concluded that, all told, the number of criteria in the response to a piece of fiction is fairly limited. And also that the esthetic dimensions were significant but hard to assess accurately.[4]

2.3 'MEANING IN LITERARY TEXTS'

This study, 'Measuring meaning mainly in the response to literary texts', was inspired discussions between Peter Brask (comparative literature) and Lars Bostrup (statistics). It was carried out by Carsten Rosenberg Hansen.

The hypothesis was that the experience of a text is a "Gestaltung". The study concentrated on exploring the nature of this process by focussing on the readers' experience of cohesion and meaning, and by assessing the influence of these factors on the immediate response to a text.

After preliminary tests, 285 twenty-year olds read 14 texts where they had to answer "yes" or "no" to four questions. The questions were

- "Is the text correct in terms of grammar?"
- "Does it have some immediately recognisable meaning?"
- "Does the text convey some atmosphere?"
- "Is there a deeper meaning in this text?"

The study convincingly showed that the experience of "grammatical correctness" and "immediate meaning" correlated in thirteen texts. In addition to traditional statistics the study involved a detailed in-depth analysis, the Rasch item-analysis, and methods from information theory and cybernetics. The most interesting discovery was that readers' answers to the questions had 'specific objectivity' in Rasch's terminology, that is, the answers by the same reader would follow much the same pattern in the response to the fourteen texts.[5]

2.4 'TENSION'

The study 'Objectively to determine 'tension, intensity, and the like' in the reading of a short story' was dubbed "Tension"; it was, then, this study which

[4]The results of this study have been published only in Finnish and in Swedish in Malmström (Ed), footnote 11.

[5]This study is described in Danish in Malmström (Ed), footnote XII.

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originally established the intense cooperation between statistics, psychology, and criticism which led to the 'methods project'. It also proved seminal to subsequent work. It was headed by Cay Dollerup (cooperating with Iven Reventlow (psychology) and Lars Bostrup (statistics, psychometrics)).

The study was initiated by an analysis of all critical usage of 'tension, intensity, and the like' in short story theory and practical writing.

According to the suggestion of Iven Reventlow, we undertook interviews during the reading process of three short stories, namely the Danish 'The Ring' by Karen Blixen (Isaak Dinesen), the Swedish 'The Basement' by Pär Lagerkvist, and the Danish 'The Ram' by the author Cecil Bödker. Readers were asked to tell all about their experience of 'tension and the like' in the process of reading.

These concepts turned out to be tenuous to the participants, and, after forty – two think – aloud interviews, we decided to close the study in 1970.

The investigation had, however, also shed light on the reading process of short fiction thanks to the introspection method used. The information we got was, briefly, as follows:

- Numerous strategies are at play in the reading process (although the emphasis is different with individual readers),
- There is a strong interplay between negative and positive evaluations of a story in the reading process; if negative evaluations win out, readers will usually stop reading the story,
- Specific passages turn out to be significant to nearly all readers, whereas other sections are not considered worthy of note at all,
- Readers use different passages of the texts for establishing interpretations which they usually consider satisfactory.

The methodological spinoffs were equally important. They were, for instance, that the introspection method could be used without causing havoc on the readers' response. We were lucky in that the concept of 'tension' was obscure to readers because all the information on the reading process was not influenced by it.

In order to keep the information at a manageable level, we also developed a rule – of – thumb for when to consider data exhaustive. This is the '+5 rule': it states that when interviewers feel that the information from readers is becoming repetetive, they do five more interviews. If nothing new has turned up, the introspection studies are discontinued.[6]

We have used the results from 'Tension' in subsequent studies.

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[6] We first described the '+5 – rule' internationally in the «Journal of Applied Language Study», 1 (1982), p. 94.

Furthermore we are in the process of repeating the think-aloud interviews to uncover differences between Americans and Danes in today's world. Over the years we have returned repeatedly to this old material for inspiration.[7]

In the present context, however, we shall let it rest.

2.5 'THE "RAM" STUDY'

This investigation had the unwieldy full title of "The response to a fictional character in the process of reading". It was based on the idea that texts project an experience of fictional characters to the readers.[8]

The study used the short story, 'The Ram' by the Danish author Cecil Bödker. It tells of a boy who behaves outrageously against the dangerous ram on a farm, so that it finally goes beserk.

The first ten think-aloud interviews were undertaken in 1968. The interviewer was a student of psychology who tested other volunteer psychologists (at the height of the student rebellion of 1968).[9] The readers were specifically asked to report on their response to the boy. The interviewer analysed the data and concluded that most readers sided with the protagonist, a boy called Vagn.

This conclusion did not tally at all with the reports from the first twenty-eight readers in the 'Tension-study' which used the same story (see 2.4 above).

The study was reorientated. It was agreed that the objectives of the study must, at the same time, accomodate the demands of criticism, experimental

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[7]This study has numerous publications in English: Cay Dollerup & F.W. Bateson: The mode of existence of the criticism of literature: an argument. «Essays in criticism», 19 (1969), 420-433.
Cay Dollerup: The concepts of 'tension', 'intensity', and 'suspense' in short-story theory. «Orbis litterarum», 25 (1970), 314-337.
Cay Dollerup: On reading short stories. «Journal of reading», 14 (1971), 445-454 (This article is not very clear because of some misunderstandings in the process of editing. Nonetheless it seems to be the first international description of think-aloud introspection in the study of literary responses).
Cay Dollerup: Associations in the reading process. 10 pages in «Proceedings from the second conference of the International Association for the empirical study of literature» (Amsterdam; in press).
Cay Dollerup: The perception of fiction. 10 pages «Studies in modern fiction: Festschrift to Bent Nordhjem» (Copenhagen; in press)

[8]The study was originally directed by Niels Jörgen Skydsgaard who also argued for a 'close reading' of the story. The study was reoriented by Lars Bostrup and the authors of this paper.

[9]The student rebellion in Denmark was a bloodless affair and the 'rioting' was confined to squatting at the Dept. of Psychology, smearing two walls with graffitti, and the shortlived occupation of the Rector's office in the course of which the student drank a bottle of his wine.
The political impact was enormous. As the outcome, students have had a say on a 50 per cent basis in decisions affecting teaching (contents, syllabus) and hence, indirectly, also on research.

psychology, and statistics. To be true, some of the results discussed below have been reached in the 1980s, more than a decade after the demise of the Nordic 'methods project'. Nevertheless we shall discuss them under this heading.

2.5.1 THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE MAJOR 'RAM – STUDY'

In the first place, we tried to identify what was wrong (if anything) with the think – aloud interviews of the first ten readers.

Accordingly, the written protocols and the tapes of the interviews were gone over again carefully. This control revealed that readers had not, after all, been all positive in their view of the protagonist. They had used words like "cruel", "bloodthirsty" and so on, and part of their sympathy was purely professional. At the same time, we undertook several series of new interviews to check further on the odd results. These new series were without insistent questioning (by the interviewer) about the readers' views on the boy; these new interviews lasted only about one fourth of the time, although the readers were from the same educational group as in the first round, (top five per cent). We must therefore assume that the persistent interrogation of the readers' was reflected in the protocols of the first ten readers.

It also appeared that the instruction to the readers to focus on their response to the boy had affected their reports. The overall view from thirty – two additional interviews made us assume that most readers changed their views of the boy in the reading of the short story.

It had been agreed that the qualitative methods should be used for collecting information which could be managed quantitatively. In other words, we would use questionnaires so that readers' reports could be subjected to a statistical analysis.

In terms of CRITICISM we used a 'close reading' of the story. This shows that the short story uses at least three different narrative angles. One of them is auctorial intrusion in which the author addresses the reader over the head of the boy (e.g. 'Vagn did not know that...'). The other one is an authorial evaluation of the boy which sheds an unfavourable light on him ('Vagn's eyes lit up with malicious glee'). The third one is a description of the events, the plot, and a stream – of – consciousness – like rendering of the boy's thoughts. Accordingly we set up three versions of the text in order to chart differences, if any, which were caused by variations in the techniques used by Ms Bödker.

The first one was the story which the author wrote, including authorial intrusion and evaluation.

The second one was the text without the author's information about things the boy does not know.

The third version was without the evaluative commentary on his actions.

In terms of criticism and methodology, it would be interesting to chart the readers' attitudes towards Vagn all through the reading. Therefore the short story was set to a length of eleven pages. In half the texts, there was an interleaved question, namely:

What is your attitude towards Vagn:

positive |_|_|_|_|_| negative

In addition, we were agreed that after the reading we could pose questions on the readers' views on the grown-ups, on Vagn's age, and personality (in semantic differentials), on the reasons for his behaviour, and on the short story's theme.

PSYCHOLOGY thought it pertinent

- to pose a few of questions to readers' age, gender, and reading habits,
- that – unlike traditional psychological testing – the questionnaire should be based on authentic reader responses to the short story (primarily from the introspection studies, but also a few critical statements (on the short story's theme)),
- that the questionnaire must be tested, first by having participants read the story and comment on the questions, and, later, by having other participants read the story and complete the questionnaire with interviews on anything which appeared problematic (in face-to-face interviews).
- that the effect of a charting of the readers' response in the course of the reading should be checked.

STATISTICS were satisfied in so far as the questions were numbered for easy transfer to punchcards. When these requirements were fulfilled, the story was read by 717 Danish gymnasiaster (Oberschule/A-level/highschool (college)) in the winter of 1970-1971.

The story was followed by the questionnaire concerning aspects of the reader's own response (This was the same with all readers). In order to avoid any bias from differences in teaching, the same number of the six different sets was handed out in each class. Table 1 shows the number of readers in each set:

Table 1: The number of readers in each set

VERSION	With questionnaire in text	Without question – naire in text	TOTAL
Original story – full text.	120	116	236
Version without auctorial intrusions	120	121	241
Version without evaluative comments	119	121	240
TOTAL	359	358	717

2.5.2 THE ANALYSES

The answers given by our readers were checked page by page to take note their comments. The marks were coded, and subjected to statistical in – depth analysis. In the following discussion, we focus mostly, if not exclusively, on findings where there is less than one chance out of a hundred that any feature is due to accident (Many studies in the social sciences are satisfied with 5%).

2.5.2.1 THE READING

There was no significant overall effect of the charting during the reading, but the readers' answers revealed that there was, indeed, a change in their attitude to Vagn.

This is shown in Illustration 3 (p. 424); the columns record the changes page by page in the interleaved semantic differential.

It is obvious that the readers' change their views from positive to predominantly negative towards the boy.

Careful statistical analysis also revealed that they did so gradually, not by leaps. It is, in other words, the sum of the boy's misdeeds rather than one single act which makes the readers reject him.

Illustration 4 (p. 426) shows the readers' responses to each of the three versions of the story (by means of shifts towards a more positive attitude towards the boy):

The version without auctorial intrusion differs significantly only after page 3, but this must be accident, for it has no excisions at all before page 5.

Illustration 3: . THE READERS' VIEWS ON VAGN IN THE COURSE OF THE READING, PAGE BY PAGE

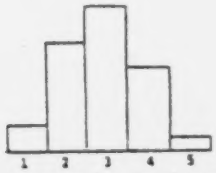
Summary of the short story, page by page

Columns giving total sum of readers after each page in each box at the question

"My attitude to Vagn is:

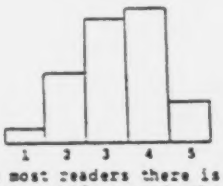
positive negative"

Page 1. Vagn is standing by a fence. He is dissatisfied with everything at the farm where his hosts have accused him of ruining the tractor which they had borrowed for the harvest



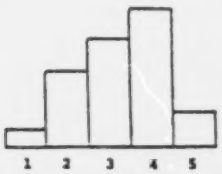
The attitude is, in the main, neutral or a bit positive.

Page 2. Vagn resents being cooped up at he farm where he cannot have any 'fun' such as walking in the fields of grain or by letting out the pigs.



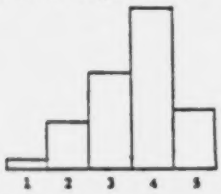
With most readers there is a decisive shift towards the slightly negative attitude.

Page 3. It is quiet. Vagn dislikes being fondled because of his curly hair, and living far from anywhere that sells ice-cream. He has been forbidden to play with the ram in the field. Instead, he decides to go and collect a fishing-rod, something he has also been forbidden to do.



There is no significant change

Page 4. Vagn spits at the ram but it is too far away. Then he picks up a piece of brick and throws it at the animal which pays no attention.



By and large no change.

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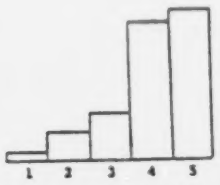
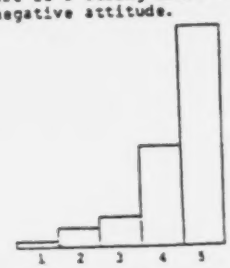
Page 5. Irritated, Vagn starts to throw more stones at the animal. The ram draws nearer and, enraged at last, it butts the fence post.



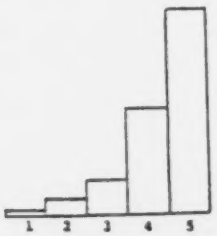
There is a strong shift towards a negative attitude.

Page 6. Vagn is fascinated. By hitting the ram on the bridge of its nose, he makes it run into the post again. The ram starts to bleed.



The attitude becomes even more negative.

Page 7. The ram stands dazed. Vagn collects the fishing-rod so that he can goad it further.



By and large, an unchanged, strongly negative attitude

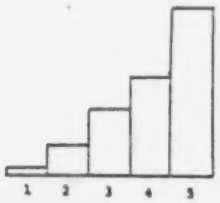
Page 8. Vagn pricks the ram as in a bull-fight. The fishing-rod breaks and is now better for hurting. The ram continually crashes into the post.

No change in the strongly negative attitude.

Page 9. Suddenly the ram smashes the post and gets out. Vagn flees to the stable. He notices that the ram is covered with blood. But that's not his problem.

Still no change in the strongly negative attitude.

Page 10. Vagn changes his clothes and goes into the garden where some guests are having coffee. Without provocation, the farmer's wife accuses Vagn of having eaten peas. Then they keep asking Vagn if he has seen Ole, the boy the guests have brought along to play.



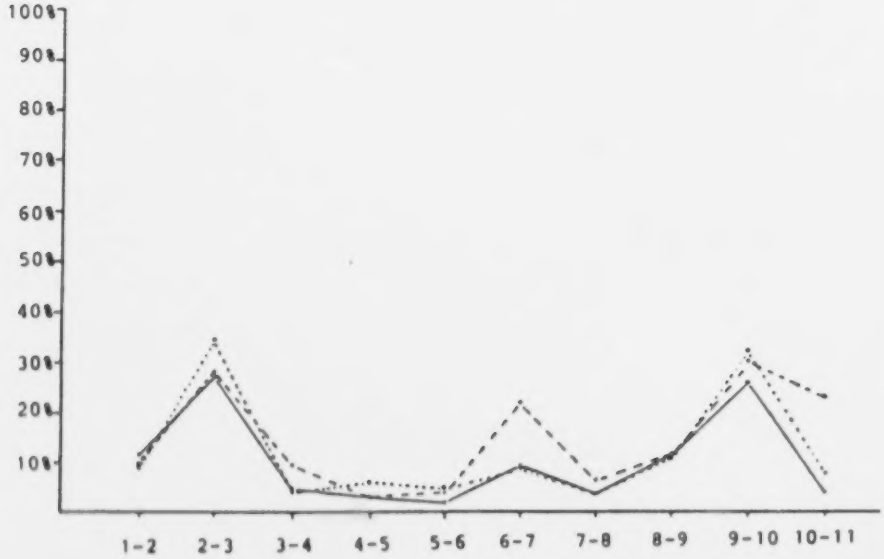
A slight change towards a less negative attitude - presumably because of the wife's unfounded accusation.

Page 11. The grown-ups exert some pressure on Vagn to make him go and look for Ole, but he insists on finishing his coffee first. Suddenly a shriek is heard: the ram has attacked Ole. Vagn's curiosity is only aroused when Ole is carried away: was the boy dead

The main attitude changes to the strongly negative one.

Illustration 4: SHIFTS TOWARDS A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN READING OF THREE DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF 'THE RAM'

——— the original short story (A)
····· the version without auctorial intrusions (B)
-------- the version without evaluative comments (C)



The story without the evaluative commentary differs after page 6, 7, and 11. On all these pages there were notable omissions.

Similarly the readers of this version were more inclined to consider the boy 'self-confident' and to agree that the story deals with a universal state of human affairs.

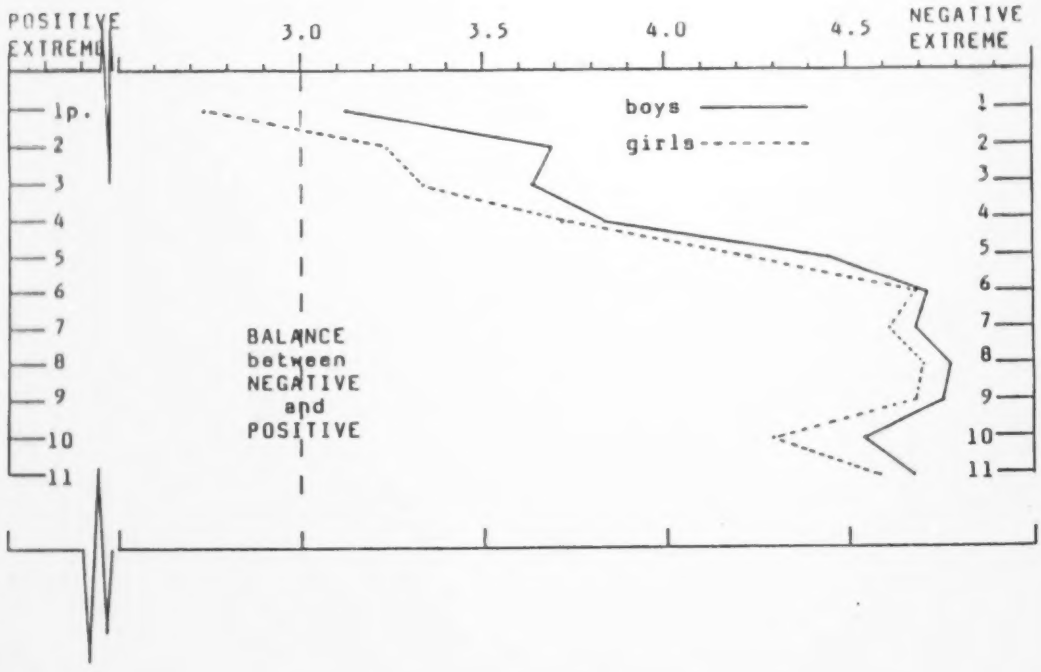
In sum the excisions did tell, even though it was less than critics expected.

In terms of themes, the suggestions forwarded by lay readers in the introspection studies were preferred to those of critics: there was a "culture gap".

Gender turned out to be a major divide.

Girls were overall more sympathetic towards Vagn than the boys at the beginning of the short story, as shown in illustration 5:

Illustration 5: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BOYS' AND GIRLS' VIEW OF THE PROTAGONIST OF 'THE RAM'



It will be noted that there is no significant difference after the reading of the first three pages; from then on, both boys and girls agree that Vagn is not at all sympathetic.

We could also chart 'a majority 'Ram'', that is a profile showing how most readers would answer at any given question. The most interesting feature about this 'majority response' is that since no two readings were identical, all readers would, at some stage or other, be in the minority. To name only one example: Most readers agreed that the story was about 'a boy and a ram', but one fourth rejected this interpretation.

There were correlations between answers to different questions. Thus, for instance, readers who believed that the story is about a clash of different social backgrounds also tended to believe that Vagn's behaviour is prompted by his social background.

The most interesting connections were uncovered by means of three-dimensional contingency calculations.

They showed there were groups of readers which were defined by combinations of responses.

The theoretical implications of these findings are that 'interpretation' is neither entirely intersubjective nor completely idiosyncratic. Readers respond to some aspects in a work in a way which is intersubjective, in so far as they are accepted by other groups of readers whose responses follow similar patterns. Such patterns may also relate to tangible differences, such as gender.

In the reading process there is thus a merging of the 'identity' of the individual reader and of communal feelings. This is the reason why we can indeed have meaningful discussions of a work of literature, despite differences of opinion.[10]

2.6 THE 'METHODS PROJECT' (1968–1971): AN ASSESSMENT

The Nordic methods project left a deep imprint on subsequent work of the people involved. In terms of direct usage the procrastination in publishing the results in one volume (in Danish and Swedish) in 1979 meant that the original inspiration in the discussions of the culture gap had receded from the public debate. The book caused no stir.

[10]There are several publications in English on the 'Ram-study'. Two long and exhaustive articles will be published in «Orbis litterarum» in 1991. The planning of the 1985-study is described in «ERIC document»: The Ram-studies ... ED 295 122 = CS 009 144 (Educational Resources Information Center. Bloomington, Indiana, USA).

However, many results were published in articles and internal reports which were handed out to interested parties. Their influence is infinitely more difficult to assess, but we hope it is part of the common knowledge.[11]

3.0 'FAIRYTALE' (1978–82)

A discussion of the 'Ram–study' inspired a Turco–Danish cooperation in a project whose aim was to uncover similarities in the response cross–culturally. The set–up of the study was bilingual, which set focus on the translations of the stories and the questionnaires involved. This study was discontinued because of methodological problems.[12]

4.0 THE CONTINUATION OF THE 'RAM–STUDY' (1982–1985)

The suggestion that we might repeat the Ram study in order to probe changes in reader expectations and "horizons" over the years had been made as early as 1970. In 1983 we returned to this idea. Given our experiences so far, we decided that in order for such a study to carry weight, it would have to straddle Danish and American–English. This would also permit other nationalities to hitch on to the study and use it for cross–cultural investigations. We therefore set up four versions of the short story in Danish and in English in checked translation. Three of them were identical with those of 1971, whereas the fourth was a more radical version of the text without the evaluative statements (because we now realised that the 1970–71 version had not gone far enough in its excisions).

We decided that in order to make for comparable results, readers must first be confronted with exactly the same set–up as in 1970–71. Yet there was no doubt that there must be new aspects in the reading experience because of changes in the cultural, social, and historical contexts. In Danish, it was, for instance, obvious that no readers in the 1980s identified Vagn as a boy from Copenhagen slums on a summer vacation on a farm (the way the readers did in 1970–71); present–day readers thought that he was a boy who had been brought to a farm in order to live in the countryside according to a social programme. So, in order to probe such new dimensions, fifty Americans, fifty Danes, and fifty students from the International School in Copenhagen were asked to respond in writing to the short story. These essays added new aspects to the response and were used for questions after the 'original' ones.

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[11]The project is described in Ed. Malmström, Sten & Mogens Poulsen. «Litteraturoplevelse – nogle metodestudier». Copenhagen: Akademisk forlag/Lund: Studenterlitteratur, 1979. This description contains the final reports of the studies (in either Danish or Swedish).

[12]The project is described in reports in «ERIC» (i.e. the Educational Resources Information Center). Among these reports we call attention to Doltas, D. & Cevza Sevgen's papers on Turkish responses.

The questions were carefully gone over in Danish and in American – English, in translation which was checked and double – checked. We started the study once again with half the texts interleaved as in 1971. After 450 readers had participated, we realised that, by an unforgiveable oversight, the semantic differential of the interleaves had six, instead of five, grades. The study came to an abrupt standstill.

So far, we have not had the ressources to resume the study, because of our work with the subsequent study, 'Folktale'. It is, however, open to any interested party.

The preparations for the 'Ram – study' were, however, important for the implementation of the 'Folktale – project'.

5.0 'FOLKTALE'

'Folktale: a cross – cultural, interdisciplinary study of the experience of literature' was begun in 1983. The objective was to establish cross – cultural similarities and differences in the response to literature.

We decided to use only two languages which we know, namely Danish and British – English. Both of them straddle more than one culture, since they are used outside the country of origin (Danish is used in Denmark; on the Faeroese; and in Greenland; English is widely used for administration and education all over the world, for instance, in Nigeria and India).

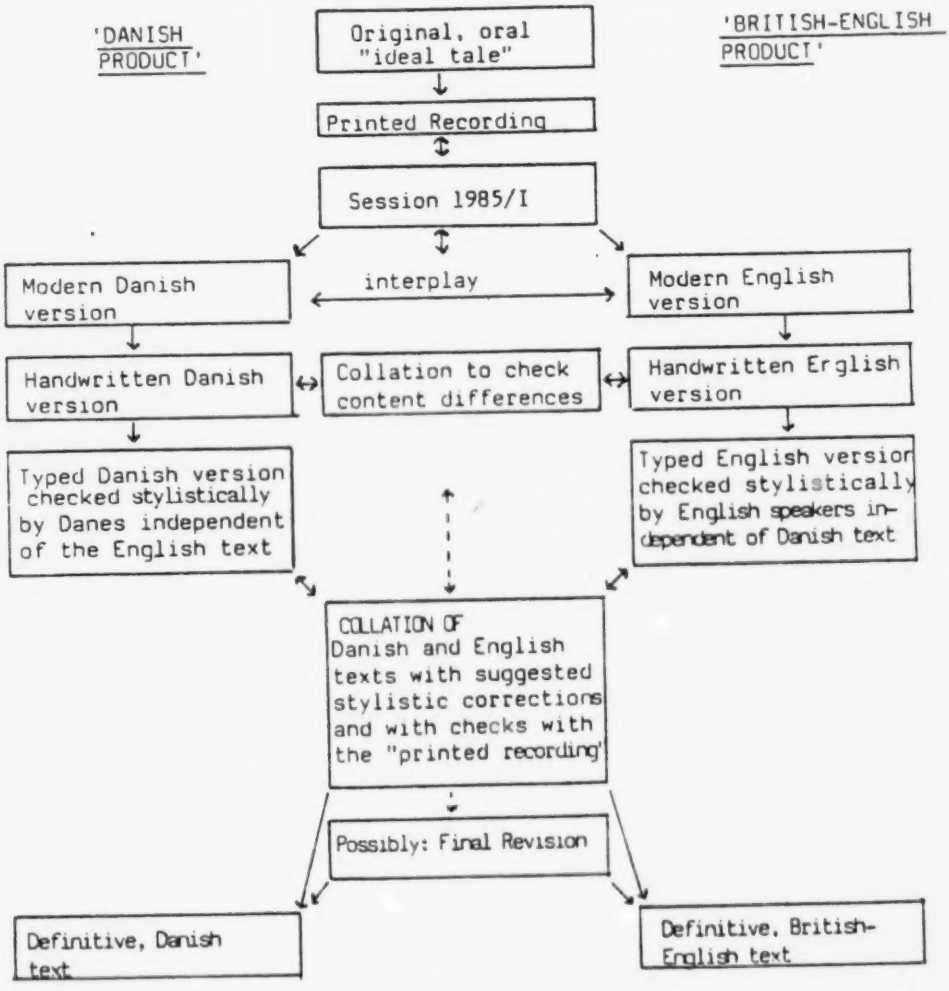
It was also a premise for 'Folktale' that literature exists only by being or having been read by a reader.

For the study we identified up to five authentic folktales from each of three different cultures, namely Denmark, Greenland (Inuit), and Turkey. These stories were then read by thirty – odd students, and the one story from each culture which had the largest number of 'legitimate responses' (that is, statements which are not actually disproved by the text) was then singled out for future work.

The Danish and the English texts of these tales were then made as 'identical as humanly possible' in sessions where professional translators and native speakers of both languages mulled over them in a word – by – word, sentence – by – sentence, and section – by – section analysis. The texts were revised by other native speakers and eventually collated. From then on, we made no changes in the tales. The process is shown in Illustration 6.

Illustration 6: A MODEL OF THE PROCEDURES FOR SETTING UP 'IDENTICAL TEXT' IN DANISH AND IN ENGLISH

A Simplified Diagramme of the Procedure and Processes for Establishing the "Same" Text in Danish and in English


'DANISH PRODUCT'
Original, oral "ideal tale"
'BRITISH-ENGLISH PRODUCT'
Printed Recording
Session 1985/I
Modern Danish version
interplay
Modern English version
Handwritten Danish version
Collation to check content differences
Handwritten Erglish version
Typed Danish version checked stylistically by Danes independent of the English text
Typed English version checked stylistically by English speakers independent of Danish text
COLLATION OF Danish and English texts with suggested stylistic corrections and with checks with the "printed recording'
Possibly: Final Revision
Definitive, Danish text
Definitive, British-English text

The three tales in Danish were sent to schools in Denmark and Greenland; the English versions to Great Britain, Nigeria, and India with five questions to which readers answered in writing. Furthermore twenty readers from Greenland, Denmark, and the English-speaking world were interviewed in think-aloud introspection studies.

The readers' essays were then used for setting up questionnaires in Danish and English. These questions were also checked by professional translators, and subsequently discussed in the team. The questionnaire was supplemented with a series of questions on the readers' backgrounds (their age, nationality, reading habits etc.). And with sixty-odd questions which uncovered their attitudes to various phenomena.

We included these questions after Norman Holland had persuaded us that it was an oversight not to chart personalities in studies as detailed as ours.[13] We chose to do so by applying methods by which we otherwise rely: asking questions.

The questions were inspired by the well-known Eysenck personality test, but limited to aspects we considered interesting.

The final questionnaire thus covered the response to the three stories; the readers' backgrounds; and the readers' attitudes.

All told, there are about than 430 questions in the booklet which is given to readers. The booklet also comprises the stories whose order is rotated for both methodological and technical reasons: The set-up makes it impossible for students to crib; we can also ask readers that have not finished the study in the time allotted (110 minutes) to jump to the most pertinent questions on their background.

At the time of writing the study has taken place in the US, in India, and in Ireland. We have decided not to start the analysis of the reader responses until the data-collection is finished.[14]

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[13] Thanks to grants from the American Embassy in Copenhagen and the Danish Research Council for the Humanities, Norman Holland and Andrew Gordon participated in our sessions in the early 1980s.

[14] The methodological considerations are dealt with exhaustively in 14 Papers, all of them in ERIC. In addition there have been several papers on problems of identifying the object of folkloristic studies and translation problems, e.g.
Dollerup, Cay & Bengt Holbek & Iven Reventlow & Carsten Rosenberg Hansen: The ontological status, the formative elements, the 'filters' and existences of folktales: a discussion. «Fabula: Zeitschrift für Erzählforschung», 25 (1984), 241-165.
Dollerup, Cay & Iven Reventlow & Carsten Rosenberg Hansen. Reader, text, translation, and interpretative potentials. «Multilingua: Journal of cross-cultural and interlanguage communication», 9 (1990), 271-284.

7.0 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR STUDIES

The main characteristics of our studies are
1. the insistence on controlled texts.
2. the importance of having a clearly defined objective (although it is not expounded at length).
3. the blending of qualitative with quantitative methods, notably in (a) the development of questionnaires and (b) in our testing of them.
4. the focus on authentic reader responses, initially in the form of think-aloud introspection.

In recent years we have also come to focus on folktales, and in that context especially on the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm who published some tales in German in 1812-15 and on the Danish response to these tales. This is mentioned because this adds an indisputable time axis to the following discussion of reading as we see it.

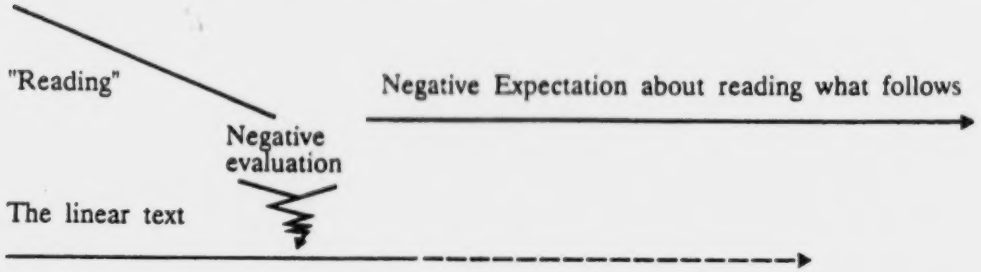
7.1 READING CROSSNATIONALLY: A DISCUSSION

One thing which seems to go everywhere is that in the course of reading, readers evaluate the text they read.

Negative evaluation may be only momentary, but when readers continue to have a poor evaluation of the story they lose interest and they will normally stop reading.

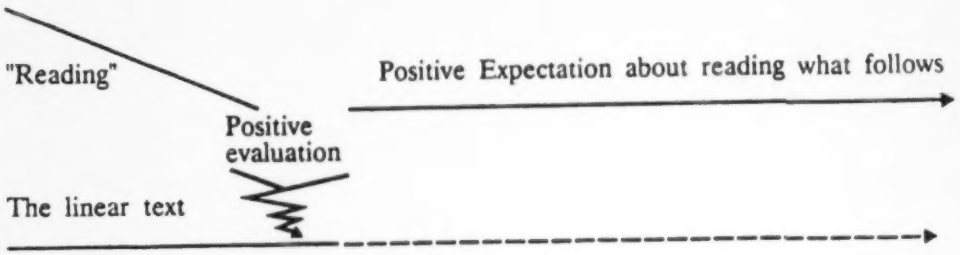
This phenomenon can be illustrated as follows:

Illustration 7: NEGATIVE EVALUATION OF A WORK OF LITERATURE



Conversely there is positive evaluation when readers go on reading. They expect the story to go on being enjoyable.

Illustration 8: POSITIVE EVALUATION OF A WORK OF LITERATURE



It will be recognised that essentially, and despite the differences in complexity, this model shows the same phenomenon as Norman Holland's illustration on p. 295 in «5 readers reading» (Yale U.P. 1975).[15]

At all events, there is a strong element of pleasure, of 'gratification' in Holland's terminology, in reading.

This element is, out of necessity, discounted in reader response research, including our own studies. It is hard to find a compromise which can accomodate all readers. It does mean, though, that all studies charting readers' responses have some in-built bias.

In addition to the evaluation, readers may predict and anticipate the plot in more or less precise detail. These predictions are more accurate with sophisticated readers than with others.

In the end, readers usually come to terms with the story with a paraphrase or an interpretation. In some noteworthy cases, the ending is not satisfactory to the reader: "This cannot be the end; there must be more to the story." And, "This is not at all the end as I remember it."

Our results show that criticism is justified in assuming that different textual signals have gaugeable effects with readers. Criticism does not operate in a void.

At the same time, it is an open question whether the same text will indeed elicit the same response from readers from different cultures. At all events, the linguistic layer of the text itself cannot have the same meaning in different languages and cultures.

It is always relevant to introduce 'real life' in questions of principle. In 'real life' translation, it is a fact – usually not mentioned in genteel society – that translations are reduced 10 to 30 percent by publishers or by translators on their own discretion. (This usually corresponds to the increased number of words in translations).

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[15] We had described the mechanism in 1970 in a Danish journal («Meddelelser fra dansklærer-foreningen», 1970, Nr. 1).

In 'real – life' translation, translated texts may acquire another tone. Thus, for instance, Danes will often cavil with translations of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytales and point out that translations fall short of rendering his humourous vein – without realising that few sociolects in other languages correspond to the Danish middle class irony.

There may be radical changes in 'real – life' translation. The folktales published by the brothers Grimm in Germany 1812 – 15 included slaughter of children and much vindictive cruelty in the endings: It is obvious that massacres were more accepted in the Europe of the Napoleonic Wars (1800 – 1815) than in later periods. Nowadays, many of the editions of these stories are produced in international 'coprints' where the illustrations are the same and only the text is printed in different languages. In these cases, there is little typographical space for the text, and the translator rarely has a chance to use the original cruel endings.

Andersen and Grimm (both of which are translated into more than 100 languages) also relate meaningfully to a rise in the middle classes in Europe in the last century. The norms of this bourgeoisie has its impact on the stories as well, since sexuality was not mentioned at all; in the Grimm collection it was actually censored out by Wilhelm Grimm himself.

These translations still connect with the names of the original storytellers. The point to note is that they are changed in the process of transfer and adapted somehow or other to new languages and cultures and yet accepted as originating in another language.

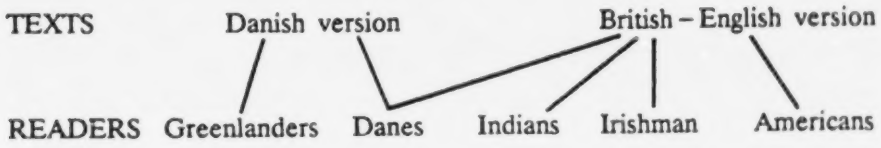
Conversely, in our studies we insist that the texts must linguistically be the same (in order to have some stability in the study). It stands to reason that many words will be unfamiliar to readers outside the cultures of origin. An obvious example is the phenomenon of "flensing" which appears in the Greenlandic story.

We also appreciate that different cultures have different high – status animals which may transform into human beings (in Greenland it is polar bears; in Northern Europe it is typically dogs; in the Middle East it is horses). But there is no way of being sure that this applies to all readers from that culture. Perhaps this identification of animals with humans may be changing with urbanisation, with the establishment of middle classes, and with industrial development. We do not know, and therefore we must try it out.

At present, we can only hypothesise that responses are changing over the years with readers from the same groups. This can, however, be checked by a repetition of the 'Ram – study'.

We hope to get some inkling of the difficulties at the linguistic level by having Danes read the stories and the questionnaires in English, as well as in Danish, as shown in Illustration 9.

Illustration 9: A TABLE OF READERS IN 'FOLKTALE'



In the planning of 'Folktale', we made one important decision: although all other questions were based on reader responses, we included three control questions about each story which dealt with indisputable facts (e.g. 'What is the man's first task'). This we did in order to be sure that readers had actually read the stories.

Yet, there is a more central concern which may indeed show that our grand scheme is ethnocentric: it may be that, apart from the positive evaluation which is a prerogative for the existence of any narrative, *the very process of reading is defined in different ways in different cultures.*

It is no surprise if this is the case: so far, our studies (and those by others) have shown that narratives change according to situational contexts – and that there is a multiplicity of aspects to which readers can relate even at some vaguely intersubjective level. Yet in terms of reader response research, we suggest that it is fruitful to compare studies to see how they supplement one another. In «The responses of adolescent while reading four short stories» (1964), James R. Squire found that girls were more self-involved than boys (P. 21-23). As previously mentioned, Norman Holland found 'gratification' in «5 readers reading». And Gunnar Hansson has repeatedly used semantic differentials (e.g. «Dikt i profil» (1964)) and stressed the strong element of pleasure in reading (mostly so in his recent «Inte en dag utan en bok» ('Not a day without a book') which details the reading of avid readers of 'subliterary genres'). These studies should be compared for generalisations about similarities in the reading of literature. In such an undertaking, the main impediment to an understanding of the common ground between seemingly diverse studies is, in all likelihood, the scholarly jargon in which we describe our findings.

When this is disregarded, it may indeed turn out that there is much similarity between results.

Furthermore, it may be that, by setting up studies which like ours test out critical thinking with 'real readers', other critical schools than 'close reading' can also be shown to operate on solid, verifiable foundations.

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